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ABSTRACT

An undergraduate psychology course (Models of Human Behavior) that is taught at New Orleans's Loyola University is described. The survey-type course emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding human behavior and spans several major orientations in Western intellectual thought regarding human behavior. The course is intended to familiarize undergraduate students with many of the great ideas of the great thinkers so that students will develop that knowledge base as a requisite to responsible decision making steeped in rational thought and value considerations. Though rooted primarily in psychology, the Models of Human Behavior course also reflects themes from the disciplines of philosophy, theology, sociology, political science, and biology that have an impact on human behavior. Theorists surveyed in the course include Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aguinas, Marx, Freud, Sartre, Skinner, Rogers, and Lorenz. Particular emphasis is given to the contributions of Freud, Skinner, and Rogers considered against the backdrop of the Greco-Christian tradition of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas. Contains six references. (GLR)

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Models of Human Behavior:
An Interdisciplinary Instructional Focus

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is on an undergraduate psychology course entitled Models of Human Behavior (MHB) that emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach. Though rooted primarily in psychology, the MHB course also reflects themes from the disciplines of philosophy, theology, sociology, political science, and biology that have an impact on human behavior. Theorists surveyed in the course who represent a spectrum of diverse views on reality, truth, values, human nature, and behavior include the following: Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Marx, Freud, Sartre, Skinner, Rogers, and Lorenz. Particular emphasis is given to the contributions of Freud, Skinner, and Rogers considered against the backdrop of the Greco-Christian tradition of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas.

Models of Human Behavior:
An Interdisciplinary Instructional Focus

An essential feature of the undergraduate experience at Loyola University of New Orleans is the so-called common curriculum array of courses designed to provide students with a broad-based exposure to the liberal arts and humanities. As one might expect, a major part of the intent behind this genre of general education is to familiarize undergraduates with many of the great ideas of the great thinkers that are primarily (though not exclusively) representative of our Western intellectual tradition. The justification here is simply to enhance the chances that students will develop that knowledge base rooted in our cultural heritage that is requisite to responsible decision making steeped in rational thought and value considerations.

The focus of this paper is on a specific psychology course offering that constitutes an elective in the behavioral/social science category of Loyola's common curriculum; namely, a course entitled "Models of Human Behavior." As suggested somewhat by its title, Models of Human Behavior (MHB) represents a survey-type course that spans several major orientations in Western intellectual thought regarding human behavior as largely a function of human nature and one's overall philosophical outlook. More

specifically, the course covers the following traditions/ individuals that represent a spectrum of diverse views on reality, truth, values, human nature, and behavior: (a) the Platonic-Augustinian tradition, (b) the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, (c) Karl Marx, (d) Sigmund Freud, (e) Jean-Paul Sartre, (f) B. F. Skinner, (g) Carl Rogers, and (h) Konrad Lorenz. Particular emphasis is given to the contributions of Freud, Skinner, and Rogers considered against the backdrop of the Greco-Christian tradition of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas.

Course Rationale & Nature

The raison d'etre of this course is the belief that given the complexity of human behavior in both its individual and social contexts, its understanding can perhaps best be enhanced by an interdisciplinary instructional approach. Such an approach considers human conduct as most intelligible only when addressed in the context of one's view of human nature, which in turn may be considered a function of one's particular outlook on reality, truth, and values. In the parlance of one of contemporary psychology's parent disciplines--philosophy--views regarding metaphysics (what is real?), epistemology (what is truth and how is it attained?), and axiology (what are values?) serve as precursors of one's view of human nature, which correspondingly is a major antecedent to one's explanation of human behavior.

As already alluded to, this MHB course is rooted primarily in psychology but goes on to reflect themes from the disciplines of philosophy, theology, sociology, political science, and biology that impact human behavior. The ten theorists (Plato through Lorenz) cited earlier suggest as much regarding the multidisciplinary nature of the course; its interdisciplinary nature resides in how the course integrates themes from these six disciplines through certain curricular coverage, instructional emphases, primary and secondary reading selections, and writing assignments.

Philosophical Views & Human Nature As Antecedents of Human Behavior: An Illustration

The Skinnerian model can serve here as an illustration of the functional role played by one's philosophical outlook and view of human nature as precursors of one's explanation of human behavior. As suggested by Morris and Pai (1976), Modern Scientific Realism represents the philosophical context in which one may position the behavior-management technologies associated with Skinner. The view of reality here is one emphasizing exclusively a world of objective material entities that represent a universe governed by immutable physical and behavioral laws of nature. Truth for the most part is scientific, synthetic, and evident pending appropriate inquiry as well as observable, quantifiable,

and contingent on empirical verification. Values emanate from nature in both the ethical realm of human conduct and the aesthetical dimension of artistic appreciation. Accordingly, as further expressed by Morris and Pai (1976) with respect to ethics,

> nature calls for a pattern of action toward others that we can discern through social observation. The Law of Generosity (the proper balance between generosity and stinginess) is embedded in reality, and the conduct of human beings in their natural behavior will reveal it to us. . . . Virtue is found in the rational comprehension of natural necessity. (pp. 240-241)

Reflecting this philosophical view of reality, truth, and values is a perspective on human nature that is material in essence, morally neutral, temporally focused, and responsive to patterns of behavioral laws that bear on the individual via a range of environmental stimuli. Human behavior, in turn, then manifests itself as a repertoire of responses to these external stimuli filtered through the unique set of one's own genetic predispositions. Contrary to this view, for example, is the classical position that links behavior partly with an individual's possession of a spiritually-based power of self-determination--an inner condition or feature of human nature advanced in the Greco-Christian tradition but

interpreted by Skinner as an "explanatory fiction" that is totally explainable via reinforcement contingencies and genetic endowment.

By way of elaborating on this classical model that challenges the Skinnerian illustration above, this Greco-Christian perspective is treated in the MHB course by an appeal to the Platonic-Augustinian and Aristotelian-Thomistic traditions. Here one encounters a philosophical outlook of reality that entails both material and immaterial dimensions as well as a view of truth that extends beyond synthetic scientific knowledge to encompass analytic intuitive knowledge and revelatory knowledge. Values, accordingly, are not "nature-restricted" but may also assume a transcendental quality with an origin and destiny that are spiritual in essence. Human nature here is twofold in that it encompasses not only the material feature of a corporeal mechanism but also the spiritual dimension of an eternal soul differentiating humankind from the other species of animal life. Human behavior, then, becomes a function not only of the reinforcement contingency and genetic endowment dynamics of Skinner but also of the intellectual deliberations and free choices of the person that exist on their own merit as a consequence of one's spiritual nature.

Curricular & Instructional Focus:
A Multidisciplinary-Interdisciplinary Effort

As already mentioned, the curricular coverage and instructional emphases of the MHB course are multidisciplinary

in nature by virtue of their appeal to certain representatives of the disciplines of philosophy (specifically, Plato, Aristotle, and Sartre), theology (Augustine and Aquinas), sociology and political science (Marx), psychology (Freud, Skinner, and Rogers), and biology (Lorenz)--although one must hasten to acknowledge some degree of overlap among these disciplines and figures (e.g., linking Aquinas also with philosophy).

The interdisciplinary feature of the course surfaces by way of (a) the range and integration of assigned primary and secondary source readings across the ten historical figures--see, e.g., Stevenson (1981) and Nye (1986)--and (b) the type of written assignments required of the students. For example, the parallel that can be partially established between Freud's personality constructs (Id, Ego, and Superego) and Plato's tripartite structure of mind (Appetite, Reason, and Spirit) is developed against the backdrop of Stevenson's (1974) discussion in Seven Theories of Human Nature as well as selections from Freud's (1926/1953-1974) The Question of Lay Analysis and Plato's Republic (see Jowett, 1937).

With respect to a representative written assignment geared to promoting an interdisciplinary interpretation, each student is required to author a position paper aligning oneself with any one of the eight traditions or models covered in the course. Regardless of the model subscribed to, though, one's position must be explained and defended vis-a-vis the following

five orientations: (a) the Platonic-Augustinian tradition, (b) the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, (c) Freud, (d) Skinner, and (e) Rogers. A student subscribing to the psychoanalytic themes of Freud, for instance, would be expected not only to explain and defend Freud's major positions but also to compare and contrast them with those themes advanced by the two major Greco-Christian traditions as well as those views promoted by Skinner and Rogers. Again, the emphasis here stresses the student's survey and eventual interrelating of various models of human behavior rather than a survey and exclusive treatment of only one model.

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